

Book Information

Book Name: The cross and the crescent

Author: Jerald F. Dirks

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In this book, the author touches the lives of those Christians who have not been given the knowledge the author have gained both about Islam, from his direct contact with Muslims, and about Christianity from his seminary education. The author digs deep into the roots of Christianity to bring out obscure information that highlight what was once common between Christianity and Islam. He tries to share with those Christians who are willing to listen – what is often known by their clergy and church leaders, but seldom finds its way into their knowledge of their own religion. Likewise, he also tries reaching out to the Muslims, in order to help them understand the religious commonality that they share with Christians.

Dr. Jerald Driks, the Author, is a former ordained minister (deacon) in the United Methodist Church and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School.

The book falls into 8 chapters:

Chapter1:

Parallels between Christianity and Islam

Chapter2:

Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Chapter 3:

The books of revelation and scripture

Chapter 4:

The baptism of Jesus

Chapter 5:

The crucifixion

Chapter 6:

The mission and ministry of Jesus

Chapter 7:

One size fits All

Chapter 8:

The Prophet Job (Ayyoub)

Preface

As recently as the late 19th century, it was not uncommon to find Christian men and women prefacing a book by invoking the name of God. Today, that is a rare occurrence, and often the cause of a raised eyebrow in what is becoming an increasingly secular world. Within Christianity, such a formal invocation of the name of God has become anachronistic and out of fashion. In contrast, most publications by Muslim writers commence with the invocation "Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim, which reads "in the name of God, most Gracious, most Merciful". As such, one still finds within the Muslim world the continuation of a practice that was formerly quite common within the Christian world.

Similarly, in days gone by, Christians frequently interspersed a statement of their intentions or of their predictions by saying "God willing". This served as an acknowledgment by Christian men and women that, in the final analysis, their intentions and predictions would be fulfilled only with the grace of God. Such Christian verbiage is now considered a relic of the past. However, Muslim men and women still constantly pepper their statements with the phrase "Insha 'Allah", meaning "God willing".

This manner of invoking the name of God, and of acknowledging the sovereignty of the Almighty God in all that we do and plan, serves to highlight the central

tenet of this collection of essays, which draws close parallels between Islam and Christianity. Further, as one investigates historical Christianity, and gets closer to the roots of Christianity, that shared commonality and the interrelationship between Islam and Christianity become ever stronger and more pronounced. Unfortunately, this close interrelationship between these two religions is often overlooked. For many Occidental Christians, Islam is seen as being decidedly foreign, as being the religion of another place and of a foreign people, i.e., Arabia and the Arabs. In reality, this perception is far from being accurate. Islam, no less than Christianity, claims to be a universal religion, which cannot be appropriated by any national or ethnic group nor by any geographic area. Arabs represent only a minority of the world's Muslims, and Islam has spread far beyond the borders of the Middle East. Moreover, at present, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States, having approximately seven million adherents.

Clearly, the need for mutual understanding and appreciation between Christians and Muslims becomes ever more imperative. Unfortunately, for most Western Christians, differences in language and in certain literary conventions add to the perceived foreign nature of Islam. As one example, Western Christians are used to the word "God", and typically find the word "Allah" somewhat mysterious and troubling.

They do not understand that "Allah" is nothing more than the contraction of two Arabic words, which mean "the God", or by implication "the One God". As such, it is not surprising that Arab Christians commonly use the word "Allah" when speaking of the deity. As a second example, Western Christians are often uneasy about the Islamic convention of conferring the phrase "peace be upon him" to the names of the prophets of Allah. Yet, a third example finds Muslims typically objecting to the use of such dating conventions as BC (before Christ) and AD (annos domini, i.e., in the year of our Lord), since they maintain that none other than Allah is Lord. Obviously, such linguistic sensitivities need to be overcome, in order for Christians and Muslims to develop a proper appreciation of the commonality between their religions.

Having said the above, I find it useful to introduce the author to the reader, so that he may have some understanding of his qualifications to discuss the issues at hand. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School, and was formerly an ordained minister (deacon) in the United Methodist Church. His personal experience of the interrelationships between Christianity and Islam and their common roots covers a journey of many years that has evolved in depth and breadth with time. It began almost thirty years ago in a course at Harvard on comparative religion. It developed further during the last two decades as he studied the history of the Arabian horse, and grew to fruition as he started moving within the Muslim communities in America and in the Middle East.

The Cross & The Crescent

The first essay in the book is a simple recounting of the author personal experience of the commonality to be found between Christianity and Islam, and is entitled "Parallels between Christianity and Islam". Its targeted readership includes both Muslims and Christians, but for each group a separate message has been intended. The second essay, "Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Origins and Relationships", seeks to resolve certain barriers to communication existing among members of these three religious groups. In that regard, Muslims may better understand the conceptual and communication barriers which separate Christians and Jews from them, while Christians and Jews may appreciate those conceptual and communication barriers separating Muslims from them. The third essay presents a comparison and analysis of the structure and provenance of the Qur'an, the received Torah, the Psalms, and the canonical gospels of the New Testament. This essay presents some fairly technical information, which sheds significant light on the formation of these sets of scripture, and thus illuminates some aspects of the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam not covered in the prior essay.

The next five essays focus on specific topics in the Judeo-Christian tradition. These essays contain a great deal of information regarding the basic foundations

of Christianity, and how they relate to Islam. To a great extent, this consists of information not known to the Christian laity, but information that is known to the better educated of their clergy. The primary reason behind writing these essays is to educate Christians about the origins and foundations of their own religion, in the hope that this may lead them to appreciate the heritage, which they so closely share with Islam. Additionally, Muslims may gain a much better appreciation of just how similar certain branches of early Christianity were to the teachings of Islam.

The last essay, "A Concise Introduction to Islam: Articles of Faith and Pillars of Practice", is an introduction to Islam for the Christian reader. In that respect, I have attempted to bridge the Judeo-Christian tradition and Islam wherever possible, in order to help the Christian reader gain a better understanding of Islam and of its similarity to his or her own religious tradition. As such, this introduction to Islam approaches certain issues from a slightly different perspective than do most such presentations on Islam. In conclusion, while this final essay was written primarily for the Christian reader, it's the author's sincere desire that the Muslim reader may also find it worthwhile reading.

Parallels between Christianity and Islam

Academic Encounters with Islam: Familiar Names

In pursuing his decision to enter the ministry, the author attempted to receive the best education that he could. Thanks to Allah once again, he was lucky to be admitted to Harvard College (Harvard University) on scholarship. During his freshman year, he enrolled in a two-semester course in comparative religion, which was taught by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose specific area of expertise was Islam. He says: "As I began my study of Islam, I was surprised more than ever before to learn how similar Islam was in so many aspects to my own Christianity. Certainly, the religious history and heritage of the two religions seemed similar, if not nearly identical. After all, my initial reading of the Qur'an revealed numerous references to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David,

Solomon, John the Baptist, and Jesus, peace be upon them. In fact, those of the Judeo-Christian tradition may be surprised to learn that the Qur'an specifically names many Biblical figures far more often than it refers to Muhammad by name". In that regard, using 'Abdullah Yusef 'Ali's English translation of *The Meaning of The Holy Qur'an*? and counting the number of times a name is cited in the text, the author found that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, and Jesus are all mentioned far more frequently than are.

Parallel Stories in the Qur'an and the Bible

In reading the Qur'an, the author quickly discovered that the similarities between the Qur'an and the Bible (Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition) are not limited to the use of names of prominent Biblical characters alone.

Within the pages of the Qur'an, the author found many stories that are an impressive parallel to those recorded in the Bible. Occasionally, the stories in the Qur'an offer a slightly different perspective and detail from the parallel ones in the Bible. However, the overall similarity is impressive, as is shown in the following few examples.

The Creation and Fall of Adam

Both the Bible and the Qur'an address the issue of the creation of the first man, Adam, and of his subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The Biblical narration is recorded in Genesis 2:4-3:24, and details that Adam was created "from the dust of the ground"; and Allah "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life", and Adam became a living being and was asked to give names to every animal. Eve, Adam's wife, was formed by Allah from one of Adam's ribs. Allah then declared that the two were free to eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden, barring one particular tree. Satan, in the guise of a serpent, persuaded Eve, who in turn persuaded Adam, to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, disobeying the command of their Creator. Thereupon, their nakedness became manifest to them and they were ashamed of it. In punishment of their

disobedience, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. In a distinct similarity of description, the Qur'an the author says draws a close parallel to this instance:

Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man, from sounding clay from mud molded into shape; when I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto Him."¹⁰

And He taught Adam the names of all things...

"O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the garden, and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish: but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression." Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them, in order to reveal to them their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said: "Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest ye should become angels or such beings as live forever". And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: "Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?" They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: if Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost". (Allah) said: "Get ye down, with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood—for a time". He said: "Therein shall ye live, and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last)."

Cain Murders Abel

Genesis 4:1–16 states that Adam and Eve had two sons, i.e., Cain, the elder, and Abel, the younger. Upon reaching maturity, both Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to Allah, but only Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to Allah. Realizing this, Cain was furious, and murdered Abel in a rage of anger and frustration. Allah then cursed and punished Cain for his homicidal behavior. The Qur'an offers an almost

identical narration, but with some additional details about Abel's refusal to fight his brother, Cain.

Recite to them the truth of the story of the two sons of Adam. Behold! They each presented a sacrifice (to Allah); it was accepted from one, but not from the other. Said the latter: "Be sure I will slay thee." "Surely," said the former, "Allah doth accept of the sacrifice of those who are righteous. If thou dost stretch thy hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand against thee to slay thee: for I do fear Allah, the cherisher of the worlds. For me, I intend to let thee draw on thyself my sin as well as thine, for thou wilt be among the companions of the fire, and that is the reward of those who do wrong." The (selfish) soul of the other led him to the murder of his brother: he murdered him, and became (himself) one of the lost ones.

Moses and the Promised Land

According to the Bible (Numbers 13:1–14:38 and Deuteronomy 1:19–40) Moses and the Israelites, having escaped from Egypt, were directed by Allah to invade and take the land of Palestine. Before beginning their invasion, the Israelites sent out spies into Palestine. Except for Joshua and Caleb, all the other spies reported that a successful invasion was not feasible, since the inhabitants of Palestine were far taller and stronger than the Israelites. Even though Joshua and Caleb urged invasion and reliance upon Allah, the people refused to obey them. At this point, according to Numbers 13:11–12, Allah reportedly threatened to disinherit the Israelites, a punishment that Numbers 13:13–14:38 states was only averted by the pleading of Moses to Allah. However, as punishment, the Israelites were forced to continue wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, before they were allowed to enter Palestine. A similar description appears in the Qur'an, but with some greater detail.

Remember Moses said to his people: "O my people! Call in remembrance the favor of Allah unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples. O my people!

Enter the holy land which Allah hath assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will ye be overthrown, to your own ruin." They said: "O Moses! In this land are a people of exceeding strength: never shall we enter it until they leave it: if (once) they leave, then shall we enter." (But) among (their) God-fearing men were two on whom Allah had bestowed His grace: they said: "Assault them at the (proper) gate: when once ye are in, victory will be yours; but on Allah put your trust if ye have faith." They said: "O Moses! While they remain there, never shall we be able to enter, to the end of time. Go thou, and thy Lord, and fight ye two, while we sit here (and watch)." He said: "O my Lord! I have power only over myself and my brother: so separate us from this rebellious people!" Allah said: "Therefore will the land be out of their reach for forty years: in distraction will they wander through the land: but sorrow thou not over these rebellious people."

However, there is one marked difference between the narration of this incident in the two Holy Books. While the Qur'an reports that it was Moses who asked Allah to separate him from the Israelites, the Bible maintains that Moses pled for Allah's forgiveness of the "rebellious people" – the Israelites – after Allah threatened to disinherit them from His favors. Nonetheless, the Biblical and Qur'anic accounts, in spite of this slight variation, are amazingly similar.

The Birth of John The Baptist

It is not only in the Old Testament that one finds similarities between the Qur'an and the Bible, there are also similarities between the Qur'an and the New Testament as well.

Parallels between Christianity and Islam

leading up to the birth of John ("Yahya" in Arabic) the Baptist, as reported in Luke 1:2-24, 57-66. According to this story, Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were an aged couple, who had never had children –Elizabeth being barren. Once, when Zechariah was praying in the sanctuary, the angel Gabriel appeared, and

announced to Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and accepted by Allah. Zechariah and Elizabeth were soon to have a son who would be named John, and who would be a prophet to his people. Zechariah asked for a sign to confirm this message regarding the birth of a son. According to the account of Luke, the sign was that Zechariah was made mute, and allegedly remained mute throughout the conception, gestation, birth, and first eight days of John the Baptist. Only upon confirming his wife's choice of the name John for their son, did Zechariah regain his speech. The above account parallels the Qur'an, which, too, speaks of this event.

"There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant unto me from Thee a progeny that is pure: for Thou art He that heareth prayer!" While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya, witnessing the truth of a word from Allah, and (besides) noble, chaste, and a Prophet—of the (goodly) company of the righteous. "He said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son, seeing I am very old, and my wife is barren?" "Thus," was the answer, "Doth Allah accomplish what He willeth." He said: "O my Lord! Give me a Sign!" "Thy Sign," was the answer, "Shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signals, then celebrate the praises of thy Lord again and again. And glorify Him in the evening and in the morning."

Bearing in mind that "Yahya" is merely the Arabic name for "John", the above passage from the Qur'an offers impressive similarity to the account reported in Luke. The only significant discrepancy is in regard to the length of time that Zechariah remained mute, which the Qur'an limits to only three days.

The Birth of Jesus

The Biblical account of the angelic announcement to Mary of the coming birth of Jesus is related in Luke 1:26–38. Skipping over the later theologizing to be found in this passage from Luke, the basic outline is that the angel Gabriel informs Virgin Mary that she has found favor in the sight of Allah, and that she will soon give birth to a son, who will be named Jesus. In a puzzled state, Mary asks as to

how she could possibly give birth, when she is still a virgin, to which Gabriel reportedly answers that: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." The words attributed to Gabriel in the above quoted passage call to mind the polytheistic Greek myths of the gods descending from Mount Olympus to rape and impregnate mortal women. In contrast to this polytheistic residual as found in Luke, the Qur'an, while paralleling the account from Luke in most other respects, presents the virgin birth of Jesus as an act of miraculous creation, not as an act of impregnation.

"Behold! The angels said: O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee—chosen thee above the women of all nations. O Mary! Worship thy Lord devoutly: prostrate thyself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down." This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal unto thee (O Prophet!) by inspiration: thou wast not with them when they cast lots with arrows, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary: nor wast thou with them when they disputed (the point). Behold! The angels said: "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus. The son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah; he shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous." She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: Allah createth what He willeth: when He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is! And Allah will teach him the book and wisdom, the law and the gospel,..."¹⁷

Summary and Conclusions

There are many more parallels that can be illustrated between the Qur'an and the Bible. In both books, one finds the story of Noah's ark and the flood. In both books, one finds similar and additional stories regarding Moses, e.g., the conflict between Moses and the pharaoh of Egypt, the story of Moses receiving the covenant at Mt. Sinai, etc. Likewise, one finds the story of Joseph, the Israelite

vizier of Egypt, which unfolds remarkably and in great detail in the Qur'an. Furthermore, the Qur'an tells the story of David's killing of Goliath, the story of King Saul, the story of Abraham's trials, etc. Unfortunately, time and space do not permit that all of these parallel stories between the Qur'an and the Bible can be individually addressed.

Biblical Characters in the Qur'an

However, it is also the case that the Qur'an reports numerous stories, regarding well-known Biblical characters that cannot be found in the Bible. One example of the Qur'an reporting a story not found in the Bible would be the allusion in the above quoted passage from the Qur'an to various individuals casting arrows to see who would be charged with the care of Mary during her pregnancy. Quite simply, this story is not to be found in the contemporary Bible. Another example would be the passage in the Qur'an that refers to Jesus fashioning a bird out of clay, and then, by Allah's leave, causing that clay bird to come to life. Once again, this story cannot be found anywhere in the modern Bible. Nonetheless, one can see that such stories do find expression in the early Christian literature, most especially in the so-called apocryphal books of the New Testament. As such, these stories illustrate that the Qur'an is often more consistent with the early roots of Christianity, than is modern Christianity, itself.

Encounters with Early Christianity

Graduating from Harvard College in 1971, the author was accepted on scholarship to the Master of Divinity program at the Harvard Divinity School (Harvard University), having previously obtained his License to Preach from the United Methodist Church in 1969. After completion of the first year of a three-year study program at Harvard Divinity School, he was ordained into the diaconate of the United Methodist Church in 1972, and was from that point an ordained minister.

There is some irony, as the author mentions, in the fact that the supposedly best, brightest, and most idealistic of ministers-to-be are selected for the very best of seminary education (e.g., that offered at that time at the Harvard Divinity School). The irony is that, with such an education, the seminarian is exposed to a vast knowledge of historical truth – such as the formation of the early, "mainstream" church, and how it was shaped by geopolitical considerations; the "original" reading of various Biblical texts, many of which are in sharp contrast to what most Christians read when they pick up their Bible, although gradually some of this information is being incorporated into newer and better translations of the Bible; the evolution of such concepts as a triune godhead and the "sonship" of Jesus; the non-religious considerations that underlie many Christian creeds and doctrines; the existence of those early churches and Christian movements which never accepted the concept of a triune godhead, and which also never accepted the concept of the divinity of Jesus; and those early Christian writings, once regarded as scripture by many early Christian churches (known as the New Testament apocrypha). Moreover, the information contained therein differed from the information in the canonical New Testament that emerged some centuries later.

Dwelling briefly on the subject, one must consider the issue of those early Christian writings — not incorporated into the later formation of the New Testament.

During the author's seminary encounters in tracing the roots of early Christianity, he amazingly discovered that certain specific stories in the Qur'an (not found in the contemporary Bible, and occasionally even at odds with those contained in the Bible) were preserved and recorded identically in the New Testament apocrypha. Some examples of such occurrences are enumerated below.

The Birth and Lineage of the Virgin Mary

The books of the contemporary New Testament offer nothing or very little substance with regard to the background of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The only readily available information can be seen in Luke, where Mary is said to have been a relative of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and where it is stated that Mary spent three months of her pregnancy in the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. In contrast, the Qur'an offers a great deal of information regarding Mary.

Behold! a woman of Tmran said: "Oh my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: so accept this of me: for Thou hearest and knowest all things." When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!"—And Allah knew best what she brought forth—"And no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the evil one, the rejected." Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty; to the care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you?" She said: "From Allah: for Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure."²¹

Three points emerge from the foregoing Qur'anic quote. First, the reference to "a woman of Amran" appears to be a statement that the lineage of Mary's mother traced back to the Biblical Amram, the son of Kohath, a member of the Levite tribe of Israel, and the father of Moses. As there was a pronounced tendency among the Israelites to marry within their own tribe, in all probabilities, Mary was of the Levite tribe. Second, the quotation specifically states that Mary was miraculously "supplied with sustenance" from Allah. Third, the same passage from the Qur'an distinctly says that Mary was placed in the care of Zechariah, while Luke merely says that Mary visited Zechariah and Elizabeth for three months during her pregnancy. As an additional fourth point, and referring back to a previously

quoted passage from the Qur'an, it is noted that several individuals cast lots with arrows to see who would be entrusted with the care of Mary.

The above four points find specific support in the so-called New Testament apocrypha. The Gospel of the Birth of Mary, preserved in a reference given by Faustus, the Bishop of Riez in Provence, directly states that Mary was a Levite. Further, a passage from the New Testament apocrypha says that angels fed Mary during her stay at the Temple in Jerusalem. Regarding Mary being entrusted into Zechariah's care, the New Testament apocrypha provides support, by noting that Zechariah petitioned the High Priest about Mary. Further, regarding the casting of lots to determine who would care for Mary, two passages in the New Testament apocrypha provide evidence for such an event, with Joseph being the one who was chosen to succeed Zechariah in taking care of Mary.

Jesus Speaks in Infancy

In a moving passage, the Qur'an describes the reaction of people to Mary having given birth to Jesus. Apparently, they were all too ready to think the worst about this righteous young woman, her pregnancy, and her subsequent child. To all of them, Mary said nothing in defense, but pointed to her infant child. Thereupon, the infant Jesus spoke, defending his mother's honor and preaching to the onlookers.

At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: "O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor was thy mother a woman unchaste!" But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He hath given me revelations and made me a prophet; and He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live: (He) hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable;..."

The foregoing account of the birth of Jesus does not appear in the current New Testament. However, the story of Jesus speaking while still an infant in the cradle is preserved in the New Testament apocrypha. Two different passages in the Qur'an refer to Jesus fashioning a clay bird, and then, by Allah's will, making it come alive.

Summary and Conclusions

Taken together the Bible and the New Testament apocrypha offer dramatic parallels to many passages in the Qur'an. Such parallels suggest that Christians are well advised to explore the substantial interface between Islam and Christianity.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

- Origins and Relationships

One of the chief barriers to effective communication between people is when one assumes he is speaking the same language as others, being unaware of the fact that some key words and concepts of his conversation mean radically different things to others. One party to the conversation quickly concludes that the other does not understand what is being discussed, yet neither realizes that the common words they are using do not have a shared, common meaning for the two of them. This specific type of lack of communication is frequently encountered when people of different religious backgrounds are discussing the interrelationship of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each discussant is operating from a different definition of Judaism, of Christianity, and of Islam, depending upon his or her prior religious education and training, which has inoculated each speaker with a different understanding of the origin of the religion in question.

In some ways, it may seem strange that adherents of these three religions, which share so much common heritage, would have so much trouble communicating with each other. It is perhaps because of this common heritage that confusion is probable. When one is confronted by a radically different concept, which has no

relationship to one's typical mindset and mental representation of the world, one is forced to accommodate to that new concept, and to build a new mental framework for understanding the concept in question. However, when an apparently familiar concept, but one that is being used in a slightly different way confronts one, the temptation arises either to ignore the differences or to assimilate the concept to the individual's pre-existing mental framework. In either case, the use of the concept is distorted. As such, it may be much easier, for example, for the Christian to develop a reasonably accurate understanding of Advaitistic Hinduism, than of Islam.

Advaitistic Hinduism is so foreign to the Christian's everyday understanding of religious concepts, that he is forced to develop new and unbiased mental representations. However, Islam is so close to Christianity in so many ways that the Christian simply assumes he understands what the Muslim means, when the latter mentions terms such as "revelation", "Torah", and "gospel". Likewise, the Christian is likely to assume that he understands who the Muslim means, when the Muslim names various prophets of Islam, such as Adam, Abraham, Jesus, and Muhammad, peace be upon them all. Not to be outdone, the Muslim is likely to be just as misled by a false assurance that he understands those same terms and names when used by the Christian.

In the author's experience, one of the easiest and simplest ways of clearing up these difficulties in communication is to examine the origins of the three religions in question. As soon as one begins to do that, it becomes obvious that there is a major gulf separating the Judeo-Christian perspective of the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, from the Islamic perspective of the origins of these same three religions. Even a modest study of the conceptualization of religious origins highlights some of the common causes of miscommunication between the adherents of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the adherents of the Islamic tradition. As such, in the hope of bridging that gap in communication, the present essay examines the origin and evolution of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam from

two markedly different perspectives, i.e., the Judeo-Christian perspective and the Islamic perspective. In doing so, the present essay is necessarily somewhat simplistic and is definitely incomplete. A complete, thorough, and penetrating analysis of the topic in question would require its own multi-volume book, not a mere essay.

The Judeo-Christian Perspective

The Judeo-Christian perspective is one that is systematically taught throughout Western academic institutions, beginning in junior high school history classes and continuing throughout college level courses. It can be seen in such junior high school textbook statements as, "Judaism was the first monotheistic religion". As a brief digression, it is noted that most Muslim parents in the United States probably fail to grasp that their children are being systematically proselytized with this Judeo-Christian perspective as part of their children's public school education. Complicating the problem, because of their lack of familiarity with the Islamic perspective, the public school teachers of these Muslim children probably fail to realize that they are even engaged in an act of proselytizing.

While the major points of the Judeo-Christian perspective are typically well known to most Christians and Jews, some of the specificity presented below may represent a level of knowledge not readily available to them. This is especially likely to be the case about the nature and causes of various sects within Judaism and Christianity, and concerning specific dates and events reported below.

Ur-Judaism and the Covenant with Noah

The Judeo-Christian perspective begins with Adam, peace be upon him, and traces the descent of man down through the various Old Testament patriarchs, until arriving at Noah, peace be upon him. The actual lineage proposed by Genesis is Adam to Seth to Enos to Cainan to Mahalaleel to Jared to Enoch to Methuselah to Lamech to Noah.³ It is with the arrival of Noah that something new enters the framework of the Judeo-Christian perspective. Reportedly, Noah

was the first person with whom Allah entered into a covenant. Now, this covenant was reportedly quite primitive and limited, and very few details regarding the covenant are reported in Genesis. In fact, the only details listed in Genesis regarding this covenant are that Noah was to build the ark, and stock it with the animals of the earth; that Allah would never again destroy all mankind through a flood, and His promise of that was symbolized in the rainbow. It is of note that there is next to nothing in this report of Genesis about a monotheistic commitment of worship, etc. Nonetheless, this covenant of Noah can serve as the first possible point of origin for Judaism, or what might be better termed proto-Judaism or ur-Judaism.

More often, the Judeo-Christian tradition traces the origin of Judaism to Abraham, who lived approximately eleven generations after Noah. Here, one encounters the second covenant between Allah and man, as Allah reportedly established a new covenant with Abraham. Once again, Genesis only sparsely reports the details of this covenant. In short, this covenant can be summarized to mean that: Abraham and his descendants were to keep the covenant, and were to practice circumcision; Allah promised He would be the god of Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, peace be upon him; and Abraham and his descendants would be multitudinous. Further, Abraham and his descendants through Isaac would inherit the land of Palestine, and the covenant. The whole of history then pivoted on this covenant, the relationship between Allah and man was forever changed, and a special relationship was established between Allah and the descendants of Isaac.

It is important to note that the Judeo-Christian tradition sees this covenant between Allah and Abraham as being one of exclusive inheritance. Only Isaac and his descendants, of all of Abraham's many children, could inherit the covenant with Allah." The exclusivity of inheritance was further refined, when it was maintained that the inheritance of the covenant passed over Isaac's elder son, Esau, in favor of Isaac's younger son, Jacob, peace be upon him. As Jacob's name

was later changed to Israel, making him the eponymous ancestor of the 12 tribes of Israel, the exclusivity of the covenant was seen to reside thereafter with Israel, and with Israel alone.

Judaism Refined and the Mosaic Covenant

Several centuries after Jacob, Allah reportedly refined his covenant with the 12 tribes of Israel. This refinement, which for the first time left a recording of specified and explicit details regarding the worship of Allah and the laws of Judaism, was given to Moses, peace be upon him. The various stipulations of the Mosaic covenant are much too detailed and voluminous to go into at this point. However, it does need to be noted that, according to the Judeo-Christian perspective, this is the second point in time, in which history pivoted, and in which the relationship between man and Allah is seen as having been irrevocably changed. For those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, who resist seeing the covenant with Abraham as being the origin of Judaism, this Mosaic covenant is seen as constituting the beginning of Judaism as an organized religion.

The Role of the Prophets

A fully evolved religious structure having been decreed by the Mosaic covenant, it was inevitable that the Israelites, or at least some significant portion of them, would stray from fulfilling the obligations of the covenant. As such, Allah periodically sent prophets, i.e., those authorized to speak for Allah, to call the wayward and backsliding Israelites back to the true fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant. From the contemporary Judeo-Christian perspective, these prophets are seen as admonishing the Israelites to return to Judaism.

Despite the clarion call of these prophets, a sizable portion of the Israelites failed to listen, especially among those in the ruling class. As such, the Davidic and Solomonic Kingdom of Israel was fragmented into a northern Kingdom of Israel and a southern Kingdom of Judah around 930 BCE. From this point on, prophets were variously sent to both kingdoms. However, again, many failed to heed the

message of warning, which was delivered by these prophets. As further punishment, Allah ordained the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrian Empire around 722 BCE. The Israelites of the northern Kingdom of Israel, comprising 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel, were carried away into captivity, and failed ever to re-emerge on the pages of history as an identifiable people, thus giving rise to the 10 lost tribes of Israel.

The southern Kingdom of Judah, being primarily comprised of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, continued in a rocky existence for about 150 years more. Prophets continued to be sent to these people, but true adherence to Judaism, as specified in the Mosaic covenant, was lacking. Thus, Allah allowed the fall of the southern Kingdom of Judah to the Babylonian Empire around 586 BCE. The Solomonic Temple (see below under "The Temple Cult") was destroyed, many of the Jews were carted off into exile in Babylon, and the period of exile had begun.

In understanding the role of the prophets from the Judeo-Christian perspective, it cannot be emphasized enough that these prophets were perceived as simply calling the people back to Judaism. They did not bring any real revision to the Mosaic covenant, although they may have offered some interpretation of it. However, even this "new" interpretation should be seen as simply correcting a prior, erroneous interpretation, which had arisen among the people. As such, although these prophets were seen as speaking for Allah, they did not bring any new revelation or any real modification of the Mosaic covenant. In that regard, revelation can be seen within the Judeo-Christian perspective as having been static since the time of Moses. Further, it must be emphasized that the Judeo-Christian perspective frequently portrays these prophets as having spiritual feet of clay, i.e., of being as prone to sin, temptation, and degradation as those to whom they preached.

The Temple Cult

In the fourth year of the reign of King Solomon, peace be upon him, construction began on a magnificent temple in Jerusalem¹⁵, which measured about 90 feet in

length, 30 feet in breadth, and 45 feet in height¹⁶, and which was surrounded by various courtyards and interconnected rooms.¹⁷ With the construction of this Temple of Solomon in the 10th century BCE, the religion of Judaism became centered on the concept and ritual of temple sacrifice.¹⁸ During three separate religious holidays or pilgrim feasts, Jews were enjoined to journey to Jerusalem to give a sacrifice from the first fruits of the harvest at the Solomonic Temple. These religious festivals included Passover (at the time of the harvest of barley), The Feast of Weeks (at the time of the harvest of wheat; conforming to the Christian holiday of Pentecost), and Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths (at the time of the harvest of fruits)¹⁹. In turn, this focus on temple sacrifice elevated the importance of the role of the priests and Levites in the religious life of Judaism.²⁰

However, not all of those who claimed to be Jews acknowledged the temple cult in Jerusalem. Among them were the Samaritans, a people of mixed Assyrian and Israelite descent, who had relocated in the area, which had been the northern Kingdom of Israel, after the Assyrian conquest of the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. The Samaritans did not finally break away from Judaism until after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile (see below). However, they avoided the temple cult in Jerusalem, worshipped at their own site at Mt. Gerisim at Shechem (modern Nablus), which they claimed to be the real and actual holy site selected by Allah (as opposed to Jerusalem). These people had their own version of the Torah, which differed in many parts from the Torah of the postexilic Jews in Judea.

As noted above, the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Solomonic Temple in 586 BC. Of marked significance to the maintenance of Judaism as a distinct religion was the building of a new temple in Jerusalem at the start of the second year of the reign (522–486 BCE) of Darius I of Persia.²² While helping to maintain Judaism as a distinct entity, this second temple had considerably less grandeur than the original Solomonic Temple, although it reportedly was larger, having a width and a height of about 90 feet.²⁴ About five

centuries later, around 19 BCE, Herod the Great, the Roman-appointed King of the Jews, began building a third and much more elaborate temple, which involved a massive reconstruction and expansion of the temple built in 520 BCE. This Temple of Herod stood until its destruction in August of 70 CE by a Roman army.

Post Exilic Judaism

The Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire around 539 BCE. The following year, Sheshbazzar led the first group of returning Jews back to Palestine. This migration of returning Jews continued sporadically for the next 140 years, and was almost complete with the return of Ezra to Palestine around 397 BCE.

Post exilic Judaism was characterized by the rise of numerous Jewish sects, most of which failed to survive to modern times, but which are known to have existed in the Hellenistic period, beginning with the conquest of Alexander the Great between the years 334 and 323 BCE. Religious and secular-nationalistic-political considerations differentiated these sects, which can be roughly categorized into three main groups: the Sadducees, meaning the "righteous ones"; the Hassidim (Chassidim); and the Zealots.

The Sadducees, also known as the Zadokites, were political opportunists, who were willing to accommodate to other cultures and governments, including the Roman Empire. They were comprised mainly of members of the upper class and hierarchy, and their domain of influence was confined to the city of Jerusalem. Their philosophical rationale centered on a belief in a theocratic government, which was to be vested in the descendants of Zadok, the high priest during the reign of King Solomon. Their religious practice centered on the written law, ignoring the oral law and any written scripture outside the five books of the received Torah. For them, religious practice was focused on the rites and sacrifices of the temple. They apparently did not believe in the coming of a Messiah, in the concept of resurrection after death, or in the existence of the

angels of Allah. With the destruction of Herod's Temple in August, 70 CE, their reason for existence vanished, and they ceased to exist as a viable sect.

The Hassidim, whose name can be translated as "the pious", arose about the beginning of the second century BCE, and shortly thereafter split into two main groups: the Pharisees; and the Essenes. The prominence of these two main subgroups of the Hassidim calls for a separate discussion of each.

The Pharisees were probably the dominant Jewish sect at the time of Jesus, and likely numbered about 6,000. They resisted assimilation of Hellenistic influences, and were more nationalistically oriented than the Sadducees. Likewise, they were more of a "people's" movement, than were the more aristocratic Sadducees, but their influence was primarily felt on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The Pharisees gave rise to the various rabbinical schools and to rabbinical Judaism; and they were great proponents of the oral law, which attempted to interpret the Torah. They readily accepted as authoritative scripture the various books of the Nevi'im and of the Ketuvim, which today find their place alongside the Torah in the Old Testament. They awaited the coming of a Messiah, and believed in resurrection after death, in a final Day of Judgment, and in the existence of the angels of Allah.

The Essenes, on the other hand, numbering about 4,000, tended to withdraw from society, and established "monasteries" such as that at Qumran, on the shore of the Dead Sea, or closed communities in and around Jerusalem and probably Damascus. Like the Pharisees, they resisted Hellenistic influences, accepted the Nevi'im and the Ketuvim as scriptural, although apparently not at the same level as the Torah, and awaited the coming of a Messiah (if not two Messiahs, one being priestly and one being kingly). They believed in resurrection after death, in a final Day of Judgment, and in the existence of the angels of Allah, as well as in the final, cosmic battle between good and evil, giving a dualistic color to their theology. The Essenes also utilized a number of books, which were not acceptable to the Pharisees, and which never were accepted as part of the Old Testament canon. By and large, these books are found in various collections of the

pseudepigraphical writings, appear to have had a great influence on the early Christian churches, and are frequently quoted without reference in the New Testament. In terms of religious practice, the Essenes were characterized by their great emphasis on ritual ablution, on the repetitious use of immersion in water, by their wearing of white, by a frequently communal and ascetic lifestyle, by extremely strict marital limitations, and by a refusal to even defecate on the Sabbath. After the destruction of Herod's Temple in 70 CE, various Essenic communities either ceased to exist, or were absorbed by the nascent Christian churches and possibly by the early Mandaean movement, which alleged its origin from John the Baptist, peace be upon him.

The Zealots were primarily a political group with extreme nationalistic ambitions, which was fragmented into a variety of sub-sects, including the Galileans and the Sicarii ("dagger men" or "assassins"). They claimed their origin with the aborted uprising of Judas of Gamala (a.k.a. Judas the Galilean) in six CE. Thereafter, they engaged in isolated acts of guerrilla warfare against Rome, which were punctuated by armed uprisings, e.g., in 66 CE and in 132 CE. While Josephus claimed that their religious orientation was like that of the Pharisees, it is more likely that their nationalistic platform masked a variety of different religious practices and sects. To the extent they looked for the coming of a Messiah, they envisioned the Messiah as a warrior king, who would deliver them from foreign control. The Zealots ceased to exist after their final uprising under Simon bar Kochba in 132 CE.³⁰

Modern Judaism

With the destruction of Herod's Temple in 70 CE, the Pharisees were able to re-interpret the rites and rituals of the temple into life and worship within the synagogue and within the family. As such, not counting the small Samaritan sect of today, the Pharisees were able to survive into modern times as the only living sect of Judaism. even though in the process further sectarian groups emerged. In modern times, these sects are categorized into three main groups, which can be

ranked on a conservative to liberal scale to include Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, and Reform Judaism.

Christianity

So far, the discussion of the Judeo-Christian perspective has focused solely on Judaism. However, with the advent of Jesus Christ, the Judeo-Christian perspective now divides into a Jewish and a Christian perspective. In what follows, the "Christian perspective" is traced.

Christian perspective" refers here to that traditional corpus of beliefs, which today is held by the majority of Christian churches. In defining the Christian perspective" in this manner, it ought to be pointed out that there was no single, monolithic Christian church, which evolved immediately following the time of Jesus. Rather, there were a multitude of independent churches, each having its own set of recognized scriptures, each under its own independent bishop or leader, and each having its own viewpoint on such issues as: whether or not it was Jesus Christ, who was crucified; the nature of Jesus Christ, i.e., whether he was God, man, or some combination thereof; and the nature of God, i.e., trinitarian of one formulation or another or one and indivisible. It was not until several centuries later that these issues began to be sorted out, and the traditional consensus of Christian belief began to emerge.

With the above in mind, it can be stated that, from the Christian perspective, the birth of Jesus ushered in yet a third time in which history pivoted, and in which the fundamental relationship between Allah and mankind was forever altered. Although allegedly pre-existing his physical birth, Jesus was seen as the begotten son of God via a virgin birth, who opened up the covenant of Allah to all mankind, whose ministry was to both Jew and gentile, and who allegedly was crucified in atonement for the sins of mankind, before allegedly being resurrected. Although precise formulations of the concept of the trinity differ, Jesus was seen as one person among three (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), who shared the same divine substance.

The Christian perspective typically sees the ministry of Jesus as having evolved out of Judaism, primarily the Judaism of the Pharisaic and Essenic movements, and as having ushered in a new covenant of faith, repentance, and atonement in the "blood of Christ", which totally replaced the prior Mosaic covenant. In short, Christianity replaced Judaism, which was no longer relevant or spiritually operative after the new covenant of Christ. The age of the Old Testament prophets was now over, and the age of the Holy Spirit had begun.

As noted previously, it took some several centuries for the above consensus to emerge within Christianity. However, even then, the consensus was shaky. Disagreements as to the independence of and/or hierarchical ranking of the various bishops, and over the exact wording of the definition of the trinity, finally led to the great schism between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Catholic Churches. The latter quickly fragmented, largely along nationalistic or ethnic lines. Some centuries later, the Roman Catholic Church underwent its own schism during the Protestant Reformation, giving rise to myriad and differing Protestant denominations.

Islam

According to the Judeo-Christian perspective, Islam did not exist until the ministry and preaching of Muhammad in the seventh century CE. Originally portrayed as the anti-Christ by many Christians, the image of Muhammad later began to be portrayed somewhat more favorably among certain elements of the Christian clergy and scholars. However, the Judeo-Christian perspective still perceives that Islam originated with Muhammad, and that Muhammad created Islam by borrowing heavily from both rabbinical Judaism and from Christianity. Concerning the alleged borrowing from Christianity, it is traditionally held that Muhammad most frequently took from the teachings of the Eastern churches and from a variety of apocryphal Christian writings. Thus, from the Judeo-Christian perspective, Islam originated in the seventh century CE as an amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity.

Summary

To summarize, the Judeo-Christian perspective posits the following step-wise evolution of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Primitive or proto-Judaism can be traced to the primitive covenant between Allah and Noah. However, Judaism really has its origin with the covenant between Allah and Abraham, a covenant, which was exclusively inherited by Isaac, then by Jacob, and then by the Israelites. The covenant was then reformulated with Moses, and Judaism as a full-blown religion began. Central to the maintenance of Judaism as a distinct religious practice was the temple cult, with its focus on the act of sacrifice at the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem. Thereafter, various Israelites strayed from observance of the covenant, resulting in Allah sending prophets, who reaffirmed the Mosaic covenant, but neither added to nor modified it. This state of affairs continued until the new covenant of Christ, from which Christianity emerged. Almost 600 years later, Muhammad, borrowing heavily from both rabbinical Judaism and from Christianity, created the religion of Islam.

The Islamic Perspective

Most Western non-Muslims do not even realize that there is an Islamic perspective, which is substantially different from that of the Judeo-Christian perspective, particularly with regard to the understanding of the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As a matter of course, it is the Judeo-Christian perspective, which is systematically taught throughout Western school systems. As such, Muslim children in Western school systems are routinely indoctrinated with the Judeo-Christian perspective, often without their parents realizing it, and in direct violation, albeit unknowingly, of the American principle of separation of church and state. Ironically, even in Islamic schools in North America, classes in world history, etc. are often forced to use Western textbooks, which propagate the Judeo-Christian perspective.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam

If the teacher of such a class were not a Muslim, then the state-certified, non-Muslim teacher would probably blithely teach the Judeo-Christian perspective without even realizing that he or she is subtly proselytizing. Just as alarming, some Muslims, especially those who were educated in a Western-oriented institution of learning, or who were educated in Israeli-controlled Palestine, have come to accept the Judeo-Christian perspective, without being fully aware of the Islamic perspective.

Given the above background, the Islamic perspective is presented below. As will be seen, it sometimes parallels and at times deviates from the Judeo-Christian perspective. This is most apparent when considering terms such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, covenant, and revelation.

Like the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam traces the origin of mankind to Adam. However, unlike any conceptualization within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam posits its beginning with Adam. Islam means "submission", i.e., submission to Allah, and a Muslim is "one who submits" to Allah. Thus, the religion of Adam was Islam, as was the religion of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc.

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah—that which We have sent by inspiration to thee—and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than Allah, hard is the (way) to which thou callest them. Allah chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him).

This is not, however, to say that the Islamic religion of Adam was the same in every detail as that of Noah, or of Abraham, or of Moses, or of Jesus, or of Muhammad. In fact, it was not. However, to understand that difference, one has to understand the Islamic concepts of covenant and of progressive revelation.

Covenant and Revelation

As noted above, the Judeo-Christian tradition perceives the concept of covenant to represent a fundamental re-ordering of the cosmos, in which the relationship between mankind and Allah is completely redefined, and in which an entirely new concept of religion is introduced. Covenants are thus seen as being few and far between, represented only by: (1) the primitive or proto-covenant with Noah; (2) the defining covenant with Abraham, which was exclusively inherited by Isaac, by Jacob, and then by the Israelites; (3) the revision and elaboration of the Abrahamic covenant with Moses, with inheritance of the covenant limited to Israelites and Jews; and (4) the new covenant with Jesus, which for the first time was open to participation by non-Jews.

In marked contrast, Islam affirms a multiplicity of covenants between Allah and mankind. Every prophet of Allah, most of whose names are not even known to contemporary man, has had his own covenant, which was inherited by that prophet's people. The following quotations from the Qur'an serve to illustrate this latter point.

Remember We made the House a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and Ismael, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).

Behold! Allah took the covenant of the prophets, saying: "I give you a book and wisdom; then comes to you a messenger, confirming what is with you; do you believe in him and render him help." Allah said: "Do ye agree, and take this my covenant as binding on you?" They said: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."

And remember We took from the prophets their covenant: as (We did) from thee: from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary: We took from them a solemn covenant."

Further, a prophet of Allah was sent to every people, not just to the Israelites. There are many passages in the Qur'an referring to the fact that a prophet was sent to every people. The following represents a brief sample of those passages.

Before thee We sent (messengers) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might learn humility.

To every people (was sent) a messenger: when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged.

For We assuredly sent amongst every people a messenger, (with the command), "Serve Allah, and eschew evil": of the people were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom error became inevitably (established). So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the truth) Verily We have sent thee in truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner: and there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them (in the past).

Thus, between the time of Adam and Muhammad, covenants were plentiful, and were non-exclusive. Every person, regardless of ethnic, national, or racial descent, had the potential opportunity to inherit a covenant with Allah, and to enter into a proper, worshipful relationship with Allah.

This concept of a multiplicity of covenants is linked with the Islamic concept of progressive revelation. Since each prophet received his own covenant with Allah, the revelation of Allah as to how best to worship Him was progressively revealed over an evolutionary period. Unlike the cosmic re-orderings followed by long periods of revelatory stagnation posited by the Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam affirms a gradual evolution in the relationship between man and Allah and in man's worship of Allah. Prior revelations could and were modified, elaborated, and abrogated. In fact, such evolution and progressive revelation occurred not only between prophets, but also within a given prophet's own message and revelation. With regard to this, one needs only look to the progressive revelation

within the lifetime of Muhammad, which led from no prohibition against alcohol, to prohibition against alcoholic consumption interfering with the performance of mandatory prayers, to total prohibition of alcohol. This concept of progressive revelation is summarized in the following passages from the Qur'an.

None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?

We did send messengers before thee, and appointed for them wives and children: and it was never the part of a messenger to bring a sign except as Allah permitted (or commanded). For each period is a book (revealed). Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the mother of the book.

This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than Allah; on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the book— wherein there is no doubt—from the Lord of the worlds.

When We substitute one revelation for another—and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages)—they say, "Thou art but a forger": but most of them understand not.

Given the above, it can be seen that Islam began with Adam, gradually evolved through the different covenants and progressive revelations given to the various prophets, and finally culminated in the final revelation given to Prophet Muhammad. In this regard, the contrasts between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives are dramatic. The Judeo-Christian perspective posits a few stages of religious evolution, each of which is markedly different than the one before it. Metaphorically, one can compare the Judeo-Christian perspective to the drastic revolutions involved in the developmental stages of the caterpillar, cocoon, and butterfly. Each stage is fundamentally different in appearance than the stage before it. In contrast, the metaphor for the Islamic perspective would be that of the budding and opening of a flower, in which the message of Adam

represents the first budding, and in which the final message of Muhammad represents the flower in full bloom. However, even within that first bud of Adam's message, there were two fundamental truths, which have never been abrogated or modified, and which continued to be the centerpiece of the message of every later prophet: 1) there is no god but God (Allah), Who has no partners, and Allah is to be worshipped and served; and 2) avoid evil and wickedness, for there will be a day of final judgment.⁶⁰

Jesus and the origin of Christianity

Islam affirms the virgin birth of Jesus, but sees this not as an act of begetting, but as an act of miraculous creation, caused by Allah's verbal command. The following represents but one of several passages from the Qur'an that testifies to the virgin birth of Jesus.

Behold! The angels said: "OMary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus. The son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah; He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous." She said: "O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: Allah createth what He willeth: when He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is!".

However, in regard to the virgin birth, the miraculous origin of Jesus is seen as being akin to the creation of Adam. Just as Jesus was without a father, so Adam, having been created from the earth, was without a father and a mother.

The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be": and he was.

Islam affirms that Jesus was a prophet of Allah, and that Jesus was the Messiah or Christ. However, Islam denies the crucifixion of Jesus, and denies the divinity of Jesus. Like those prophets of Israel before him, Jesus' message and ministry were confined to the remnants of Israel and to the Jews, and were a call to return to

Islam and to proper submission to and worship of the Oneness of Allah. It's worth noting that one part of the message of Jesus was the prophecy of an additional prophet yet to come, who would be called Ahmad, which is a variation of the name Muhammad.

And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the law (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, "This is evident sorcery!"

Jesus was not the founder or originator of a new religion, or even of a new religious movement within the Judaism of his times, but was one in a succession of prophets of Allah to the people of Israel. Likewise, attempts to link Jesus with this or that particular school of Judaic thought, whether Pharisaic, Essenic, or other, are rejected, as they distort the fundamental truth that Jesus was a prophet of Allah, who was bringing a portion of the progressive revelation of Islam. All of which is not to say that there was no new component to the message that Jesus brought. The Islamic concept of progressive revelation allows for the possibility that the revelation to Jesus may have partially altered, added to, or abrogated some parts of the revelations of earlier prophets.

Muhammad and the Final Revelation of Islam

Muhammad did not originate or create Islam, nor was Islam originated based on the revelations given to Muhammad by Allah. Rather, Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets, i.e., the last in the line of Allah's prophets, just as a seal at the end of a document is the last thing affixed to that document. It may be noted that Westerners and adherents to the Judeo-Christian perspective frequently attribute hierarchical significance to the title "Seal of the Prophets", as though Muslims claim that Muhammad was the greatest or best of the prophets of Allah. This type of thinking is contrary to Islam, and is specifically prohibited by the Qur'an, which states that Muslims are to make no hierarchical distinctions among the

prophets of Allah. Like all the prophets before him, Muhammad was not divine, but was only a man endowed with the message of Allah.

However, it was through the progressive revelation given to Muhammad that Islam was perfected and completed. This revelation abrogated, elaborated, and altered parts of the revelations given to earlier prophets, was memorized and written down by the early companions of Muhammad, and became known as the Qur'an. Thus, Islam finds its final evolution in the message of Muhammad, not its genesis. Further, as the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad was the "international" prophet, bringing Allah's message not only to the people of Muhammad, whether defined as Makkans, the members of the Quraish tribe, or Arabs, but to the people of the world at large.

Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this (Qur'an), nor am I a pretender. This is no less than a message to (all) the worlds."⁸⁴

Summary

The Islamic perspective affirms the following evolution of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Islam began with Adam, and has evolved in accordance with the progressive revelations given by Allah to His various prophets. This evolution of Islam finds its perfect culmination in the final revelations of Allah, which were bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad. Early on, among the descendants of Prophet Jacob, distortions of the basic message of Islam were codified and ritualized, giving rise to the religion of Judaism. Subsequent prophets to the house of Israel continually warned the Israelites and Jews to return to God, and to forsake their deviations, which included their unbelief. Among those prophets, whose ministry was limited to the Israelites and Jews, was Jesus (the Messiah or Christ, and the son of the virgin Mary). However, Jesus' message and ministry were also distorted, giving rise to such concepts as the begotten son of God, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the trinitarian concept of God.

Conclusions

Words are sometimes deceiving in their ability to mislead others. This is especially the case when words are used to represent abstract concepts or complex systems or thoughts. As has been shown in the above discussion, words such as "revelation", "covenant", "Judaism", "Christianity", and "Islam" have radically different meanings for Muslims, than they do for adherents to the traditional Judeo-Christian perspective, which typically is the only viewpoint expressed in Western academia. Likewise, names such as Jesus, Muhammad, Moses, Abraham, etc., convey different images and associated concepts, depending upon the religious orientation of the individual. By contrasting the Judeo-Christian and Islamic perspectives on the origins of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, some of these differences have been identified and discussed. Allah willing, this endeavor may contribute to better and heightened communication among the adherents of these three religious traditions.

The Books of Revelation and Scripture

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all claim to be based on a book or books of divine revelation and scripture, which comprise the words (whether literally or figuratively understood) of Allah. While there is substantial overlap in the contents of these books, there are also certain obvious differences. An attempt has been made in this chapter to introduce and compare the structural aspects and provenance of these books of revelation and scripture. The book of revelation adhered to by Islam is a single book of revelation, i.e., the Qur'an, in contrast to the division of books found in the Christian Bible. The books of scripture adhered to by Judaism number 39 (as counted in the Christian Bible), whereas the scriptures propounded by Christianity include these 39 books of Judaism besides 27 additional books² that comprise the New Testament of the Bible.

The Jewish Scriptures

The Jewish books of scripture, i.e., the Tanakh, are traditionally organized into three categories known as: the Torah, i.e., "the law" or "the teaching"; the Nevi'im, i.e., "the prophets"; and the Ketuvim, i.e., "the writings". This three-fold division

serves as a rough chronological sequence, corresponding to the time, in which these books were accepted as canonical scripture by Judaism. This means that the Torah was probably accepted as a closed canon of scripture early in the fourth century BCE during the time of Ezra. The Nevi'im received acceptance perhaps after the schism separating Samaritans and Jews somewhere in the fourth century BCE or by the second century BCE. Finally, the Ketuvim became recognized as a category of scripture during the second century BCE, but the canon of the Ketuvim, and hence the Tanakh, was not officially closed until around the end of the first century CE, i.e., the council of Jamnia circa 85–90 CE.

Of the 39 books comprising the Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim, the Qur'an specifically mentions the Zabur (or Psalms) of David⁵, peace be upon him and the Torah (or Law) of Moses. These six books, viz., the five books of the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and the one book of Psalms, are the only ones of the 39 books of Jewish scripture that are mentioned in the Qur'an.

The Christian Scriptures

The 27 books comprising the New Testament of the Bible represent those books of scripture that are exclusive to Christianity. Of these 27 books, one is an apocalypse, one is an early church history, 21 are epistles of one sort or another, and four are labeled as being gospels. It is highly improbable that any of these 27 books were written by anyone who had first-hand contact with Jesus, peace be upon him, though each of the four gospels purports to be a history of the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

The canon of the New Testament evolved gradually over several centuries. Initially, during the first three centuries of the so-called Christian era, there was no concept of an authorized and closed canon of New Testament scripture. Various books were viewed as scriptural on the sheer strength of their self-stated claim of being divinely inspired. Their circulation and popularity among the various Christian churches gave them a further impetus in this direction. As a

result of this, what was regarded as Holy Scripture at one place was not necessarily regarded so in another.

However, in the early fourth century CE, the situation began to change. In his Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius Pamphili, the fourth century CE bishop of Caesarea, proposed a canon of New Testament scripture in which he omitted many books currently found in the New Testament. In 367 CE, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, circulated an Easter letter, which included the first listing of New Testament scripture in conformity with the current New Testament, although, only a few years earlier, he had been championing The Shepherd of Hermas as being accurate, canonical scripture. This New Testament scripture was later ratified at the Council of Hippo in 393 CE, the Synod of Carthage in 397 CE, and the Carthaginian Council in 419 CE. However, not all the Eastern churches agreed with this proposed canon until the time when the Syriac translation of circa 508 CE finally conformed to this canon.

It took three to five centuries following the completion of the ministry of Jesus before early Christian churches formulated the final canon of the 27 books, presently comprising the New Testament. Of these 27 books, the Qur'an refers only to the Gospel of Jesus, a book of revelation that was given to Jesus Christ. However, the four canonical gospels of Christianity are definitely not this book of revelation, although they may include parts of this book in their alleged recordings of sayings" of Jesus. For understanding the crux of the subject, this chapter, instead of going into the details of all the 27 books, confines itself only to the structural composition of the New Testament gospels.

The Book of Revelation given to Muhammad

A structural analysis of the Qur'an is a fairly straightforward and simple task. The Qur'an consists of only one book of revelation, all of which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, from Allah through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). However, a crucial distinction needs to be understood between: the

Qur'an, i.e., the revelation of Allah given to Muhammad; and the Ahadith (singular = Hadith), i.e., the recorded sayings of what Muhammad said and did.

The Qur'an

Prophet Muhammad reportedly received his first revelation in the year 610 CE. Thereafter, revelations continued on an episodic basis until the close of his life in 632 CE. As such, the Qur'an can be said to have an earthly birth during the years 610 through 632 CE. Throughout these 22 years, the companions of Prophet Muhammad listened to his recitations of the revelations, memorized them, and wrote them down on stones, palm leaves, and whatever other writing surface on which they could lay their hands. Those companions who successfully memorized the entire Qur'an were known as Hafez.

Upon the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE, Abu Bakr was chosen as the first Caliph of Islam. Approximately a year later, i.e., circa 633 CE, Abu Bakr appointed Zayd ibn Thabit to produce a written copy of the entire Qur'an, as revealed to Prophet Muhammad by Allah. Zayd ibn Thabit, himself a Hafez, and one who had served as the principle secretary to the Prophet, produced a complete copy of the Qur'an just about a year after the demise of the Prophet. Zayd completed this task by using his own memorization of the entire set of revelations, as well as those of other Hafez, and the available written fragments of the revelations.

This single, authenticated copy of the Qur'an was preserved dearly by Abu Bakr until his death in 634 CE. Soon thereafter, the possession passed to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam. 'Umar entrusted this copy of the Qur'an to his daughter, Hafsah, who was one of the widows of Prophet Muhammad. After 'Umar's death in 644 CE, the third Caliph of Islam, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, directed Zayd ibn Thabit to utilize the copy of the Qur'an that had been entrusted to Hafsah, and to make a final recension of the Qur'an. This final recension consisted primarily of standardizing minor differences in dialect among the various Arab-speaking Muslims of the time.

Within the Qur'an, there are divisions into Surat(chapters) and Ayat (signs or verses). Further, with some degree of accuracy, one can separate the Qur'an into earlier revelations and later revelations, into revelations received at Makkah and revelations received at Madinah, and into content areas such as sacred history, community rules and laws, and instruction on the proper belief in and worship of Allah. Nonetheless, the Qur'an remains a single, unitary book of revelation, i.e., a verbatim recording of Muhammad's recitation of the revelations he received.

It is thus clear that the Qur'an is a single document, representing a single source, which is dependent only on the revelations received by Muhammad. There has been no cut-and-paste compiling, layering of diverse material from different times, or editorial re-writes or redactionistic revisions of the Qur'an. In this regard, the provenance of the Qur'an as tracing solely to the Prophet Muhammad is historically indisputable. Whether or not Muhammad's statements of received revelation are seen by contemporary readers as being divine revelations from Allah through Jibril is a religious verdict. However, the strictly historical verdict is unambiguously clear. The provenance of the Qur'an traces only to Prophet Muhammad.

A sharp distinction needs to be made between the sayings of Muhammad, whether on religious or non-religious issues, and his recitation of the revelations he received. The former are Ahadith, while the latter is the Qur'an. Within Islam, only the Qur'an has the status of canonical scripture. However, as a source of religious information and instruction, Muslims rank the Ahadith of Muhammad as second in authority only to the Qur'an. If the Qur'an is a Muslim's primary textbook for the final examination of life, the Ahadith, on the other hand, represent the practical, supplemental reading, which may well help make the difference between passing and failing that all important examination.

Each Hadith is comprised of two parts: an Isnad, and a Matn (i.e., narrative). The Isnad consists of a complete listing of the narrators of the Hadith, and is an attestation as to the provenance of the Hadith. As a hypothetical example, an

Isnad might state that the written recorder of the Hadith received the narration from X, who received it from Y, who received it from Z, that the Prophet Muhammad said... No Hadith is accepted as authoritative without a complete and unbroken Isnad. Furthermore, each Isnad is minutely examined in order to make sure: that X actually met Y; that Y actually met Z; that Z actually met the Prophet Muhammad; that X, Y, and Z had excellent memory skills; and that X, Y, and Z were individuals of high moral character and religious repute. Only if the Isnad passes this rigorous test is the Hadith accepted as authoritative.

The second part of the Hadith consists of the Matn or narrative content of what the Prophet Muhammad reportedly said or did. This narrative content is also minutely examined to assure consistency with the Qur'an, and compliance with other, already verified, Ahadith. Assuming that the Hadith has already passed muster in regard to an examination of its Isnad, it is still not accepted as authoritative unless this narrative examination is also satisfactorily cleared.

Summary

Islam makes a sharp distinction between its canonical scripture, i.e., the Qur'an, and its supplementary books of religious instruction, i.e., the Ahadith. The Qur'an is primary, the Ahadith are secondary, but both are religiously authoritative.

In regard to the structural composition of the Qur'an, it is a single, unitary document, which was revealed over a time span of about 22 years between 610 and 632 CE. As stated earlier, there is no cut-and-paste composition, no layering, and no editorial redaction. It has a single source, and a complete, unbroken, and unambiguous provenance back to the Prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, it was compiled into a single, written document within one year of the death of the person who had originally received the revelations, viz., Prophet Muhammad. No variant versions of the Qur'an exist, resulting in the time interval between revelation and "final" compilation being the same. (The 'Uthman recension of the Qur'an merely standardized dialectic differences, and the chain of possession of the Qur'an reiterates the fact that the first compilation of the Qur'an also happens

to be its last compilation.) The short time interval between revelation and the first compilation of the Qur'an, and the care exercised by Zayd ibn Thabit and other Hafez involved in producing the complete written text, make it amply clear that there is complete and unbroken provenance between the original revelation and the initial compilation of the Qur'an. Further, as the first compilation of the Qur'an was also its last, the provenance of this book is totally complete and indisputably unbroken.